



The Edinburgh Muckraker

Equal Pay means Fair Play

Supporting Edinburgh's public sector workers - Issue 2

c/o 17 West Montgomery Place, EH7 5HA phone: 557 6242 edinburghmuckraker@riseup.net

PAY CUTS REJECTED: STRUGGLE MAY GO CITY-WIDE

The struggle by council workers against pay cuts could go city wide, as the overwhelming majority of UNISONS 8,000 members have now voted to reject the Council's "pay modernisation" proposals.

So far, industrial action has only affected the cities manual workers in UNITE, who are engaging in a work to rule and overtime ban after rejecting a £4k pay cut. The dispute could soon widen to include every council department.

Much will depend on whether rank and file workers take the initiative, as both UNISON and UNITE have been criticised by their own members for failing to defend workers' interests.

Council bosses are resorting to thinly veiled threats - with Jenny Dawe stating in the Evening News that if changes are not agreed to, they will be imposed.

Phillip Barr, Head of Human Resources at the Council, wrote to Cleansing Workers:

"If we cannot get agreement with the trades unions, the only alternative is to impose changes through a legal process. We are now considering this approach, which has been followed by many other councils across Scotland and the rest of Britain.

"We will inform you and the trades

Dawe: liar, liar, pants on fire, nose as long as a telephone wire!

The Edinburgh Evening News is being used by Council Leader Jenny Dawe, as the front line in a propaganda battle to divide and rule.

In the Edinburgh Evening News, 19 October, Dawe announced that the street cleaners and other manual workers were about to make an agreement and end their industrial action, leaving bin-workers by

200 carers and clients held an angry protest outside City Chambers on 11th November. They're facing savage cuts and a privatisation process that could see service users separated from the carers that they have built relationships with, in favour of the lowest cost company.



www.swanedinburgh.org.uk, swanedinburgh@yahoo.co.uk, <http://ldascotland.org/>

unions next week of our future intentions" (letter posted Cleansing Depots around 9 November).

Sources have said that this will involve giving 90 day notice to change the contracts unilaterally, without any negotiation.

One council cleansing worker said, "If the council issue 90 day [redundancy] notices then the Unions in the Council should call an all-out strike across the board.

"It's not only Edinburgh Council where this is happening, its other Councils too, in Leeds the cleansing workers are on all-out strike.

"I don't want any dialogue with the

themselves. A claim later found to be false.

On November 10th, Dawe announced that since the workers had not agreed to wage cuts the Council are about to impose the changes without agreement, stating "we cannot negotiate indefinitely. The only alternative to agreed changes is imposing changes through a legal process".

Council now, I think we should have one-day strikes, then consider moving to an all-out strike."

Many council workers are angry that cuts are coming from the living standards of ordinary people - when council bosses, politicians, and wealthy bankers are retaining their fat salaries, pensions and expenses.

One worker said: "The council are talking about a 4-5 year pay freeze. But will the Council freeze the Council Tax? Will my rent be frozen? And what about the c***s at the Council on 100 grand a year? They should try living in the real world."

The Muckraker says: Jenny Dawe is a liar, and a bully.

Council workers need the support of all Edinburgh residents to fight the wage cuts that the lying Council bullies are trying to impose. Workers, service users and residents need to join together to fight all the cuts in services that the lying Council bullies are trying to impose.

Fighting back

A bin worker reveals the untold story of harassment during the dispute

"The management are using bullyboy tactics and harassment. Our depot's like a police state": an Edinburgh bin worker.

The Muckraker interviews one of the workers on the bin lorries, collecting the city's refuse.

What's behind the dispute?

The reason this dispute has come about, is that this inefficient Edinburgh Council, has failed to budget for the impending equality claims from female workers (not wishing to blame the fairer sex in any way), unlike many other Councils up and down the length of Scotland, who have budgeted in varying degrees. As a result the Council have stated that all Council Manual Workers will be expected to take a drop in salary of between £6000 & £7000 from 2012. This is only to be absorbed by the ordinary manual workers (male and female)...

I might add that manual workers would currently be comfortably eligible for Legal Aid, so they are just your average Joe!

Would YOU accept this from your employer?

So, the wage cuts and changes in conditions aren't just affecting the cleansing department workers?

No, it's all the manual workers, it involves the school dinner ladies for example. One of the dinner lady supervisors was told she would have to cover two schools on her own!

We understand that you, the workers, are banning overtime and working to rule, that is following health and safety rules. Could you describe what the Council are doing to try to break your action?

People are working a full shift then not getting paid. Bin men have had the WHOLE day's wage docked, despite working the full shift. Then the following day they are told they must sign a form admitting they were guilty of 'partial performance' or they will be sent home without pay and won't be allowed to return to work until they sign it. Some workers still refused to sign, and weren't paid for several days.

Harassment, bully-boy tactics and a form of blackmail were employed to coerce workers to comply.

Management ignored all normal disciplinary procedures, there were NO verbal warnings, NO written warnings and NO information on rights of appeal were offered!

The workforce do not wish to disrupt the good citizens of the Burgh, they are only trying to carry on working for a fair day's pay. Indeed they are working to the management's Health and Safety manual, which the management are now ordering the depot supervisors to order the workers to ignore—their own rules, endangering workers' lives.

Are the management using any other tactics against you?

Yes, workers who have had to be signed off by their doctor due to stress of intimidation at work are also being docked their wage. This is completely illegal, the Council are now setting themselves above the law and believe they are more medically qualified than a GP! About half the workforce at my depot are off sick, they're stressed out their minds.

About 40-50 workers have had their wages docked, either for so-called 'partial performance' or for being off sick.

Now the dispute is not just about money, it's about all the persecution and victimisation, all the management bullying. They think they're above us all. They think we're all a bunch of numpties and won't stand up for ourselves.

What are your working conditions like?

Well, we recently experienced a monsoon season, and workers are having to return to a depot which has no facilities, i.e. no showers, no drying facilities, no canteen, and having to travel home by public transport in soaking-wet clothes.

Is this the 21st century, these conditions would seem not out of place in 1909! Would you subject one of your loved ones to these conditions?

This issue of the Muckraker was made possible by the donations and support of threatened council workers. Thanks!

Cleansing workers action committee

Cleansing workers active in the dispute have told us that the official Union structures are ineffective, and believe that an Action Committee is needed. This would bring together cleansing workers from the different depots - street cleaners, bin workers, everyone.

Each depot could choose 2 or 3 workers, then they would report back to the others in the depot. If the Committee met regularly, every week or so, the workers in the different depots could keep in touch, helping to combat managements divide and rule tactics. Workers could discuss and act, rather than just waiting for the Council or the Union.

Already some street cleaners and bin workers are keen to start such a committee, if you are a cleansing worker and are interested, contact us details on front page. You don't need to give your full name, just a first name and a phone number or e mail.

Privatisation—A Load of Rubbish

An Audit Scotland report has revealed the Council are considering privatising its refuse collection service. This would mean yet more attacks on workers' wages and conditions.

But would it reduce costs for the Council? Maybe to start with, but private companies have a habit of winning contracts with a lower bid, then putting up the price once they have their foot in the door and the Council depends on them.

The private companies like Viridor who already have recycling and waste disposal contracts with the Council charged a whopping £700,000 extra last financial year. (Ev News 29.9.09)

Fighting privatisation is important—but obviously Council control is nothing great. The Muckraker says: Give all bosses the boot!

Blood from a Stone

Why don't they want you to know how much they're paying scabs?

Edinburgh's citizens are being kept in the dark as to what our council tax is being spent on.

In an attempt to smash their manual staff's dispute, the Council have handed lucrative contracts to private firms. Like employment sharks Assist, recruiting 'bin men' via St Andrew's Square Jobcentre. These scabs are paid £11 an hour — £3 more than the real workers — *plus* Assist's secret cut on top of this for every scab.

When Labour councillor Cammy Day asked the City Council on 13 October about the number of private vehicles being used to collect city refuse, council environment leader Gordon

Mackenzie stalled: 'Full details of this and other details asked

for will be included in a comprehensive report following resolution of the dispute.' Freedom of Information laws to the rescue? Not so.

Open Government?

Early Freedom of Information (FOI) requests to the Council about the cost of these contractors refused because of 'commercial sensitivity.' But on October 1 the High Court in London ruled that contractors and local councils cannot use this excuse to prevent taxpayers from viewing contracts between the two. 'The obligation to pay local taxation,' the Court emphasised, 'is matched by the right of ensuring the money was well spent' and 'local government electors' have the right 'to inspect and copy the accounts and related documents.'

So now it seems that FOI requests about the costs of hiring private for-profit companies are simply being stonewalled.

Lies & Damned Lies

The Council's Ministry of Truth is now threatened with complaints to the Information

Commissioner for refusing to answer requests. In response the Council issued a press release to the Evening News which published it without comment on 22 October. 'The number of Freedom of Information requests dealt with on time by the city council has slumped,' ran the report. Only 64 % of requests received in August and September were answered within the statutory 20 days, compared to 89% in June and July. Why the 25% slump? Well, it seems that 'a key individual' has recently retired and this has had 'a particular impact on requests received by HR and legal services' — the two council departments that, strangely

enough, deal with the private contracts! But a Council spokesman assured News

readers that 'the Council is drawing up an action plan to improve its FOI handling.'

Rubbish. The real reason for the slump in FOI responses is that they are not answering the requests about the price of hiring private companies. If the people of Edinburgh were to find out how much it has cost them there would be a snarling outcry. Some estimates put the cost at **almost £1**

Resisting wage docking

The Council has now repaid the docked wages to some bin workers, but is still withholding pay from many. Workers are going to Tribunals to try and win back their wages—plus some workers whose wages have been repaid are still going to the Tribunal to contest the injustice they suffered.

One worker said: "I'm not going to let them get away with this, I know if I let them do this they'll go on doing this kind of thing, I'm going to stand up for myself."

Unite Union state: "Unite will meet with the Personnel Appeals Committee on 25 November to hear our case on the council's decision to withhold wages and sick pay for those employed within Refuse Collection. Hopefully they will see sense and all monies will be reimbursed."

The committee comprises Cllrs Lowrie (Convener), Coleman, Cairns, Elliott-Cannon, Blacklock, Hart, Elaine Aitken, Paisley and Burgess. The meeting is scheduled for the afternoon and the council website should give details of the exact time a week beforehand—we don't know yet if it's open to the public, though clearly the workers concerned **SHOULD** be able to attend, if there's any justice.

million so far. So YOU, whose council tax is paying private contractors to break an industrial dispute, are being lied to and kept in the dark.

Spot the Operating Licence Competition!



By law, all street cleansing vehicles should have an Operating Licence prominently displayed. Look very closely then write & let us know where you think this van's licence is

Refuse to be a scab!

The Muckraker has been told that officials at Edinburgh Job Centres have threatened to stop unemployed people's benefits if they do not apply for jobs with Assist on the scab bin lorries. This is illegal!

The Job Seekers Act 1995 states that you do not have to accept a job that is vacant

because of a trade dispute (Sections 20 (1) and 20B(1)).

If you are unemployed and are threatened in this way, point this out to the benefits office — and contact Edinburgh Coalition Against Poverty (below) who are pledged to defend anyone refusing a scab job.

Job Centre workers — show solidarity by pointing out to claimants that they are not obliged to take these scab jobs; do whatever you can to stop the job centres being used to recruit scab labour to undermine the council (and postal!) workers' dispute.

ECAP's advice & solidarity surgery every Tuesday 1-4pm at ACE, 17 West Montgomery Place EH7 5HA — tel 557 6242.

What am I reading?

The Edinburgh Muckraker is produced by an independent group in solidarity with council workers, to inform the people of Edinburgh what is really going on behind the lies, misinformation and threats.

We encourage and assist effective action to win this dispute. We aim to help Council and other workers to come together across sectional and union divides.

We see this dispute as part of a bigger battle by all working class people to fight for our needs against this profit-based system, in which people are exploited and kept down.

Interested? Please get in touch.

You do not have to accept a job that is vacant because of a trade dispute
— Sec. 20(1) & 20B(1), Job Seekers Act (1995)

Sorting the Councils rubbish *We separate fact from fiction*

“Private contractors have cleaned up the city centre”

FACT: - They have an extra loader on each vehicle; they are taking 3 days to complete routes which Council bin men complete in 1 day; the city centre had Council bin men working a night shift to assist in this clean up, Councillors conveniently omitted to state this!

“There's asbestos at Seafield depot”

FACT: - Well, who knows? Bin men at Seafield depot were told they were being moved to Powderhall & Russell Road due to asbestos contamination, yet a short time later, the private contractors moved into the depot. Was it a ruse to create space for the private contractors, or should the scabs not breathe too deeply?

Phillip Barr to union bosses: “only a small handful of workers are being hit with partial performance forms and they are only being docked about 10 or 20% of that days wage.”

FACT: - There are about 40-50 so far, who have had the whole day's wage docked, despite working the full shift and the following day are told they must sign this partial performance form

or they will be sent home without pay and if they refuse, will not be allowed to return to work until they sign it!

Evening News: “Workers told bosses they're ‘going on the sick’”

FACT: - Council bosses are **refusing to accept medical certificates** from workers' own doctors. Perhaps they have been going to medical school on the sly?

The workers who have had to be signed-off sick by their doctor due to stress of intimidation at work, are also being docked their wage, this is completely illegal, the Council are now setting themselves above the law and believe they are more medically qualified than a GP!

FACT: - Council's own Health & Safety Officer, Mr Henderson has informed the men not to uplift any refuse bag that is hung in railings above waste height, it is the responsibility of Monitors to inform the City offices not to continue with their practice of tying refuse bags on railings. Kerbside collection is exactly that, bags placed by the kerbside! Know any more porky pies being passed around? Share them with us: edinburghmuckraker@riseup.net

Round-country round-up

Glasgow

Cleansing staff in Glasgow have adopted safe working practices by no longer stopping on double yellow lines, not hopping on the vehicle when it is moving, and not lifting heavy bins, overflowing bags or damaged bags. The decision has been made ahead of new working arrangements being introduced early next year which will see most binmen move to four days on and four days off, and the majority of land and environmental services staff will be forced to take multiple roles.

Brighton

Following a revised offer from Brighton & Hove City Council GMB members in the City's City clean service has voted to suspend the industrial action for a period of up to 21 days for more negotiation to take

place.

Leeds

Leeds City Council's 'best and final offer' rejected by an overwhelming majority of 92 per cent of the Leeds refuse strikers. The offer is dependent on the restoration of weekend rates which sees the pay increase mildly, however, the long and the short of it is that £4,500 of the offer depends on crews collecting bins from 220 properties an hour rather than the current 196, despite the Councils own study carried out earlier this year showing the average hourly collection rate among a cross-section of local authorities was 192 and fell to 181 when Manchester — a city with a large number of terrace properties — was excluded. So the all-out refuse strike continues in Leeds.